

P 191526Z AUG 08  
FM AMEMBASSY LUSAKA  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LUSAKA 000827

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/17/2018

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SUBJECT: WITH MWANAWASA'S DEATH, ZAMBIA'S PRESIDENTIAL RACE BEGINS

REF: LUSAKA 825

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael Koplovsky for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Zambian Government's (GRZ's) announcement of President Mwanawasa's death (reftel) sets in motion seven days of national mourning, but also marks the beginning of Zambia's presidential race. According to the Zambian Constitution, elections must be held within 90 days, meaning before November 17. In the absence of a party Vice-President to succeed Mwanawasa, the ruling Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) is divided into three camps, consisting of veteran MMD politicians ("true blues"), members of the Mwanawasa family, and moderates who might support a bid from Vice President Banda. Meanwhile, opposition parties are using the GRZ's new wage bill as a pretext to campaign jointly against the MMD. Opposition party leaders believe that an early election will be to their distinct advantage, given the confusion within the MMD. Opposition leaders had been campaigning restrainedly until now, but had been acting as if presidential elections were an inexorable certainty.  
End Summary.

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MMD Torn by Infighting  
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¶12. (C) Cabinet's insistence during Mwanawasa's hospitalization that the President was showing improvement--and its insinuation that he would resume his duties before long--may prove damaging to MMD's credibility in the short-term. Perhaps even more harmful, however, is that Cabinet's state of denial made it difficult for MMD members to hold open discussions about party succession. Health Minister Brian Chitwo's August 8 remarks that Mwanawasa's recovery might be protracted unleashed a flood of criticism from other parliamentarians and MMD officials that revealed chords of genuine disunity within the party. MMD Spokesperson Ben Tetamashimba, seeking to quell the row, reminded party members that "no MMD members, irrespective of position, should discuss the President's illness unless quoting the State House website."

¶13. (C) As a result of its virtual gag order, MMD's succession dialogue moved underground. On August 17, Northern Province Minister Lameck Chibombamilimo told reporters that "government leaders are holding 'dark corner' meetings" to discuss the President's ailing health and vie for party leadership. According to various accounts, the MMD party has divided into three factions: MMD veteran politicos ("true blues"), members of Mwanawasa's immediate and extended family, and moderates who support Vice President Banda as a "compromise candidate." The "true blues," as the activists who democratically ousted President Kenneth Kaunda from office in 1991, view themselves as the rightful heirs to the MMD presidency. Although MMD National Secretary Katele Kalumba enjoys strong popular support within the party, particularly at grassroots level, his indictment for acts of corruption may prevent him from entering the presidential race and may resign him to the role of MMD "king maker."

¶14. (C) Perhaps out of personal ambition--as well as a fear of political retribution from former President Frederick

Chiluba, Kalumba, and others who were the subject of Mwanawasa's campaign against corruption--an element of the MMD would like to see the party leadership stay within the Mwanawasa "family tree." This circle allegedly includes Home Affairs Minister Ronnie Shikapwasha, Justice Minister George Kunda, and Defense Minister George Mpombo. Shikapwasha, a one-time Foreign Minister and religious pastor with considerable public appeal, may have all the credentials to take the reins. In the past, First Lady Maureen Mwanawasa also has shown some interest in the presidency, although her efforts to test the waters revealed modest levels of public support.

¶15. (C) A "moderate" faction within MMD reportedly views Vice President (and Acting President) Rupiah Banda as a practical compromise between the party's other two competing elements. An long-time statesman with an accomplished career and close ties to Zambia's revered first President Kenneth Kaunda, Banda potentially could draw in a wider net of voters. Banda, however, still belongs to the United National Independence Party (UNIP) and has signaled little interest in changing parties. MMD stalwarts are likely to strongly contest any efforts to relegate MMD leadership to an outsider. Banda suggested to the Charge in July that he is not interested in a presidential run because he is no longer young and healthy. United Party for National Development (UPND) leader Hakainde Hichilema discounted this, however, telling the Charge in early August that Banda "is an African politician," implying that Banda harbors tacit political ambitions.

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For HH, the Race Began Long Ago  
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¶16. (C) Since losing the 2006 presidential election, Hakainde Hichilema ("HH") has been actively campaigning in preparation for the 2011 elections. He expressed a great deal of confidence to Charge during an August 12 meeting regarding his popular support, explaining that in 2006 he had captured one quarter of the votes despite coming out of relative obscurity and campaigning for less than two months. Now, in his second year of campaigning, he professed support in rural areas not usually considered UPND "domain," including Northern and North-Western Provinces. He also explained that he had been approached by a number of senior politicians from other parties who are prepared to either join his camp or lend their support to his campaign. Hichilema explained in some detail his plans for Zambia's economic development, based on private-sector led growth, and noted that some of his change agenda is too progressive even for his own party members. Whether HH wins the election or not, he is apt to raise the level of debate among presidential candidates, given his clear vision and strategy for lifting Zambians out of poverty.

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PF Divided but not Conquered  
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¶17. (C) On August 18, Charge met with Patriotic Front (PF) leader Michael Sata, who came in second in the 2006 presidential elections with 29 percent of the vote. Sata acknowledged that his party is still divided between those who are participating in the National Constitutional Conference--against Sata's decree--and those who are not. Despite his party's disarray, Sata has joined forces with UPND to protest new legislation proposed by Cabinet that will increase Parliamentarian and senior GRZ officials' salaries by as much as four-hundred percent. The two unnatural allies seem to share little more than a desire to confound the MMD. Sata--a loose cannon at the best of times--speaks of his presidency as a foregone conclusion and excoriated MMD Cabinet members for allegedly unconstitutional behaviors. PF Member of Parliament Given Lubinda told Poloff that PF will not seek the support of Chiluba, as it had in 2006. Lubinda blamed Chiluba for the discord within the PF party. He acknowledged that Sata is a populist with strong

anti-investor rhetoric, but assured poloff that Sata is too intelligent to pursue the policies that form the basis of his campaign and popularity.

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Comment  
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18. (C) The MMD's rose-tinted assessments of Mwanawasa's recovery, right up until his death on August 19, may have been wishful thinking as the party endeavored to buy time to preserve the status quo and to address discreetly succession issues. With 89 days (or less) to go before presidential elections, they are apt to feel the squeeze from the ambitious Hichilema, or the cunning Sata. Without Mwanawasa's respected paternal guidance, election officials and candidates may not feel subject to the same level of electoral discipline as in the 2006 general elections.

19. (C) The GRZ is obviously not prepared to run a full-scale presidential election within three months. Its clumsy and ham-handed efforts will be painted by Sata and HH as electoral fraud. Therefore international observers and donor funding to ensure that the elections are as free and fair as possible within the given constraints will be crucial to the legitimacy of any new Zambian government.

KOPLOVSKY